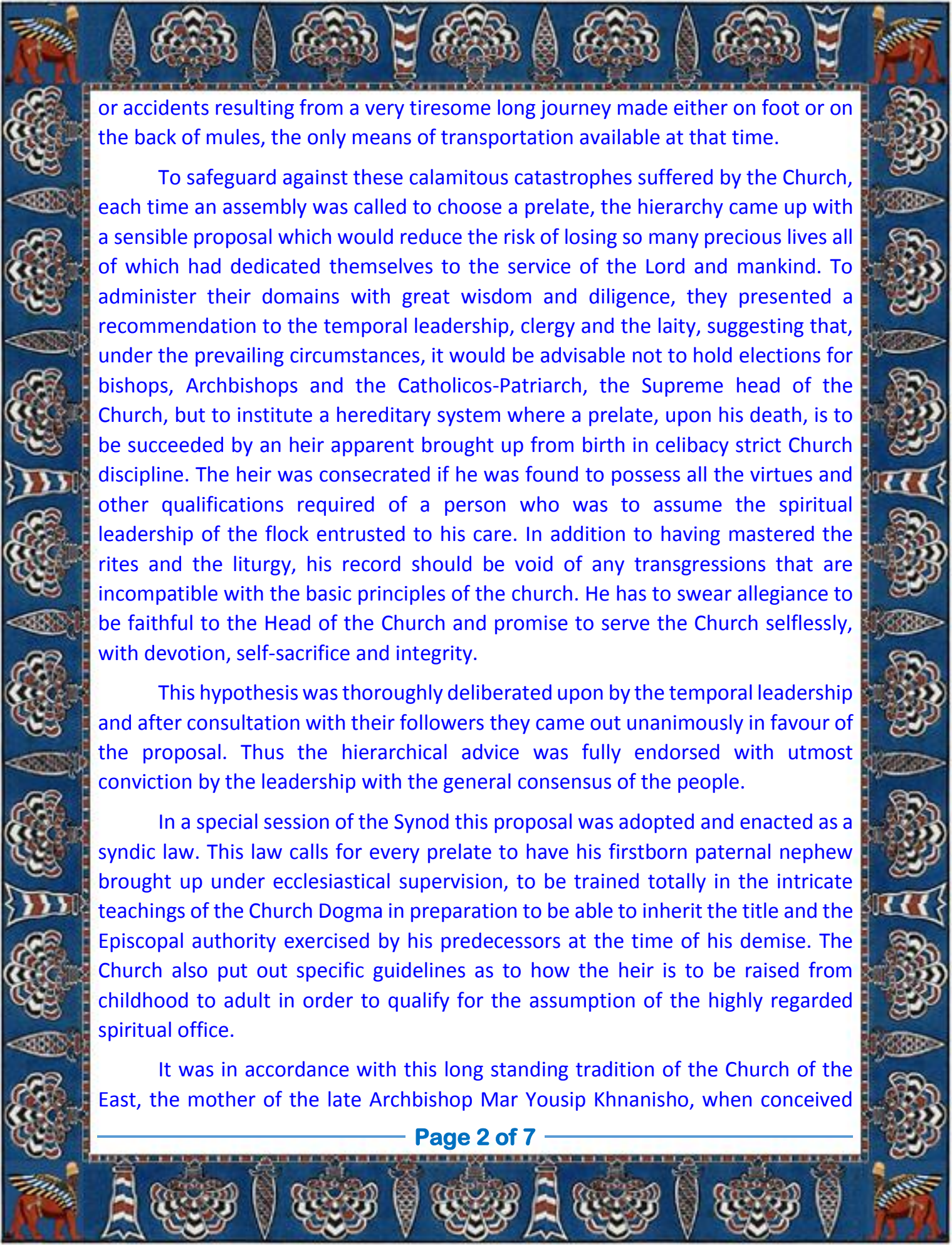


Memories from The Holy Apostolic Catholic
Assyrian Church of the East
His Holiness † Mar Yousip Khnanisho
Archbishop of Shamisdin and Rustaqa
Thursday, May 18, 1893 (Mar Ishoo, Turkey)
to
Sunday, July 3, 1977 (Baghdad, Iraq)
A Short Biography

A few centuries ago, the Assyrians were passing through a perilous phase in their long and versatile history. They were surrounded on all sides by fanatic and non-Christian nationalities, who made no secret of their evil intentions to harass them constantly unless they gave up their Christian Faith. The Assyrians were subjected to all kinds of heinous crimes from murders to rustling of their livestock, abduction and assaults on their young women, and worse, committing acts of sacrilege against ecclesiastics and hallowed church properties.

Since the first century, the Church of the East consecrated its prelates from among an assembly of their peers. Elevation of Archbishops or Bishops to the next higher rank was dealt with in like manner. In the event of a See being vacant due to the passing away of the previous holder of the office, a date was set to hold elections for a successor. Qualifying prelates, from widely scattered dioceses would proceed immediately to the predetermined place where balloting would take place. Each prelate was accompanied by a fairly large retinue travelling for days, weeks or months through very rough and mountainous terrain or arid desert. Most often, their path would cross territories inhabited by wild and barbaric marauding tribesmen who preyed on their innocent victims to plunder and kill. Those that escaped death at the hands of bandits lost their lives through sickness, epidemics



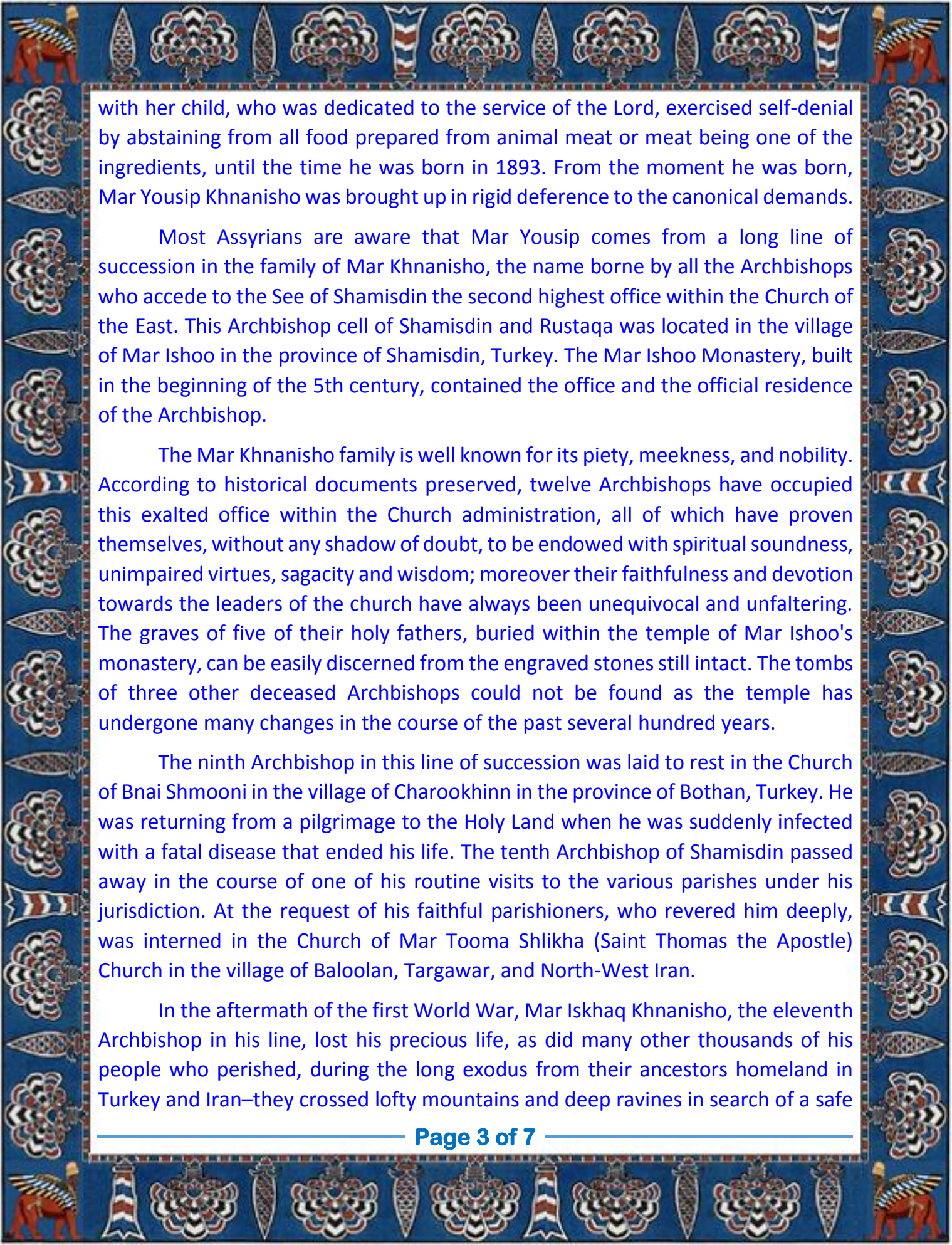
or accidents resulting from a very tiresome long journey made either on foot or on the back of mules, the only means of transportation available at that time.

To safeguard against these calamitous catastrophes suffered by the Church, each time an assembly was called to choose a prelate, the hierarchy came up with a sensible proposal which would reduce the risk of losing so many precious lives all of which had dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord and mankind. To administer their domains with great wisdom and diligence, they presented a recommendation to the temporal leadership, clergy and the laity, suggesting that, under the prevailing circumstances, it would be advisable not to hold elections for bishops, Archbishops and the Catholicos-Patriarch, the Supreme head of the Church, but to institute a hereditary system where a prelate, upon his death, is to be succeeded by an heir apparent brought up from birth in celibacy strict Church discipline. The heir was consecrated if he was found to possess all the virtues and other qualifications required of a person who was to assume the spiritual leadership of the flock entrusted to his care. In addition to having mastered the rites and the liturgy, his record should be void of any transgressions that are incompatible with the basic principles of the church. He has to swear allegiance to be faithful to the Head of the Church and promise to serve the Church selflessly, with devotion, self-sacrifice and integrity.

This hypothesis was thoroughly deliberated upon by the temporal leadership and after consultation with their followers they came out unanimously in favour of the proposal. Thus the hierarchical advice was fully endorsed with utmost conviction by the leadership with the general consensus of the people.

In a special session of the Synod this proposal was adopted and enacted as a syndic law. This law calls for every prelate to have his firstborn paternal nephew brought up under ecclesiastical supervision, to be trained totally in the intricate teachings of the Church Dogma in preparation to be able to inherit the title and the Episcopal authority exercised by his predecessors at the time of his demise. The Church also put out specific guidelines as to how the heir is to be raised from childhood to adult in order to qualify for the assumption of the highly regarded spiritual office.

It was in accordance with this long standing tradition of the Church of the East, the mother of the late Archbishop Mar Yousip Khnanisho, when conceived



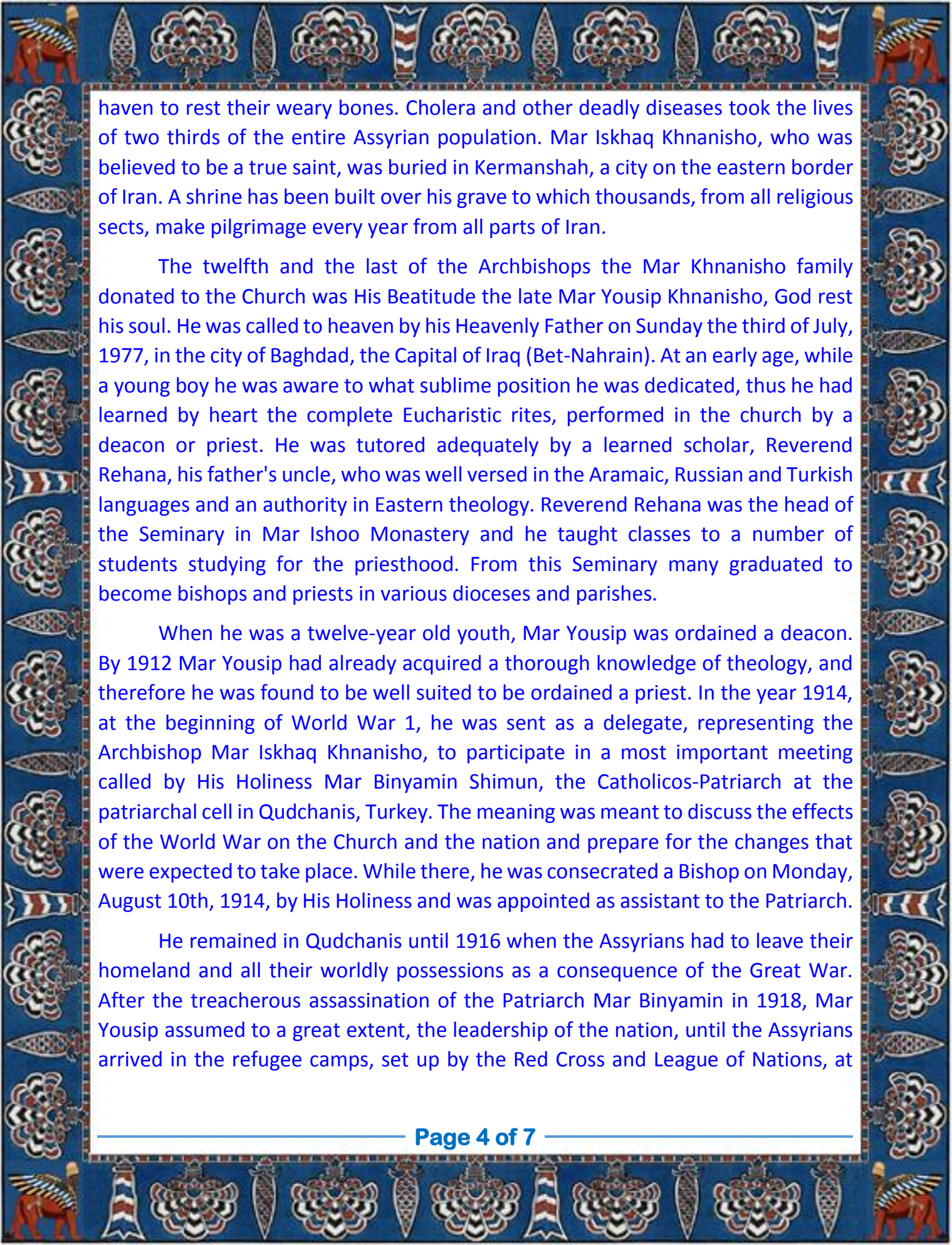
with her child, who was dedicated to the service of the Lord, exercised self-denial by abstaining from all food prepared from animal meat or meat being one of the ingredients, until the time he was born in 1893. From the moment he was born, Mar Yousip Khnanisho was brought up in rigid deference to the canonical demands.

Most Assyrians are aware that Mar Yousip comes from a long line of succession in the family of Mar Khnanisho, the name borne by all the Archbishops who accede to the See of Shamisdin the second highest office within the Church of the East. This Archbishop cell of Shamisdin and Rustaqa was located in the village of Mar Ishoo in the province of Shamisdin, Turkey. The Mar Ishoo Monastery, built in the beginning of the 5th century, contained the office and the official residence of the Archbishop.

The Mar Khnanisho family is well known for its piety, meekness, and nobility. According to historical documents preserved, twelve Archbishops have occupied this exalted office within the Church administration, all of which have proven themselves, without any shadow of doubt, to be endowed with spiritual soundness, unimpaired virtues, sagacity and wisdom; moreover their faithfulness and devotion towards the leaders of the church have always been unequivocal and unfaltering. The graves of five of their holy fathers, buried within the temple of Mar Ishoo's monastery, can be easily discerned from the engraved stones still intact. The tombs of three other deceased Archbishops could not be found as the temple has undergone many changes in the course of the past several hundred years.

The ninth Archbishop in this line of succession was laid to rest in the Church of Bnai Shmoon in the village of Charookhinn in the province of Bothan, Turkey. He was returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land when he was suddenly infected with a fatal disease that ended his life. The tenth Archbishop of Shamisdin passed away in the course of one of his routine visits to the various parishes under his jurisdiction. At the request of his faithful parishioners, who revered him deeply, was interned in the Church of Mar Tooma Shlikha (Saint Thomas the Apostle) Church in the village of Baloolan, Targawar, and North-West Iran.

In the aftermath of the first World War, Mar Iskhaq Khnanisho, the eleventh Archbishop in his line, lost his precious life, as did many other thousands of his people who perished, during the long exodus from their ancestors homeland in Turkey and Iran—they crossed lofty mountains and deep ravines in search of a safe



haven to rest their weary bones. Cholera and other deadly diseases took the lives of two thirds of the entire Assyrian population. Mar Iskhaq Khnanisho, who was believed to be a true saint, was buried in Kermanshah, a city on the eastern border of Iran. A shrine has been built over his grave to which thousands, from all religious sects, make pilgrimage every year from all parts of Iran.

The twelfth and the last of the Archbishops the Mar Khnanisho family donated to the Church was His Beatitude the late Mar Yousip Khnanisho, God rest his soul. He was called to heaven by his Heavenly Father on Sunday the third of July, 1977, in the city of Baghdad, the Capital of Iraq (Bet-Nahrain). At an early age, while a young boy he was aware to what sublime position he was dedicated, thus he had learned by heart the complete Eucharistic rites, performed in the church by a deacon or priest. He was tutored adequately by a learned scholar, Reverend Rehana, his father's uncle, who was well versed in the Aramaic, Russian and Turkish languages and an authority in Eastern theology. Reverend Rehana was the head of the Seminary in Mar Ishoo Monastery and he taught classes to a number of students studying for the priesthood. From this Seminary many graduated to become bishops and priests in various dioceses and parishes.

When he was a twelve-year old youth, Mar Yousip was ordained a deacon. By 1912 Mar Yousip had already acquired a thorough knowledge of theology, and therefore he was found to be well suited to be ordained a priest. In the year 1914, at the beginning of World War 1, he was sent as a delegate, representing the Archbishop Mar Iskhaq Khnanisho, to participate in a most important meeting called by His Holiness Mar Binyamin Shimun, the Catholicos-Patriarch at the patriarchal cell in Qudchanis, Turkey. The meaning was meant to discuss the effects of the World War on the Church and the nation and prepare for the changes that were expected to take place. While there, he was consecrated a Bishop on Monday, August 10th, 1914, by His Holiness and was appointed as assistant to the Patriarch.

He remained in Qudchanis until 1916 when the Assyrians had to leave their homeland and all their worldly possessions as a consequence of the Great War. After the treacherous assassination of the Patriarch Mar Binyamin in 1918, Mar Yousip assumed to a great extent, the leadership of the nation, until the Assyrians arrived in the refugee camps, set up by the Red Cross and League of Nations, at

Baaqooba, Iraq in 1918. In December of 1918 His Lordship was elevated to the rank of Archbishop in Baghdad Iraq, by the late Patriarch Mar Paulus Shimun.

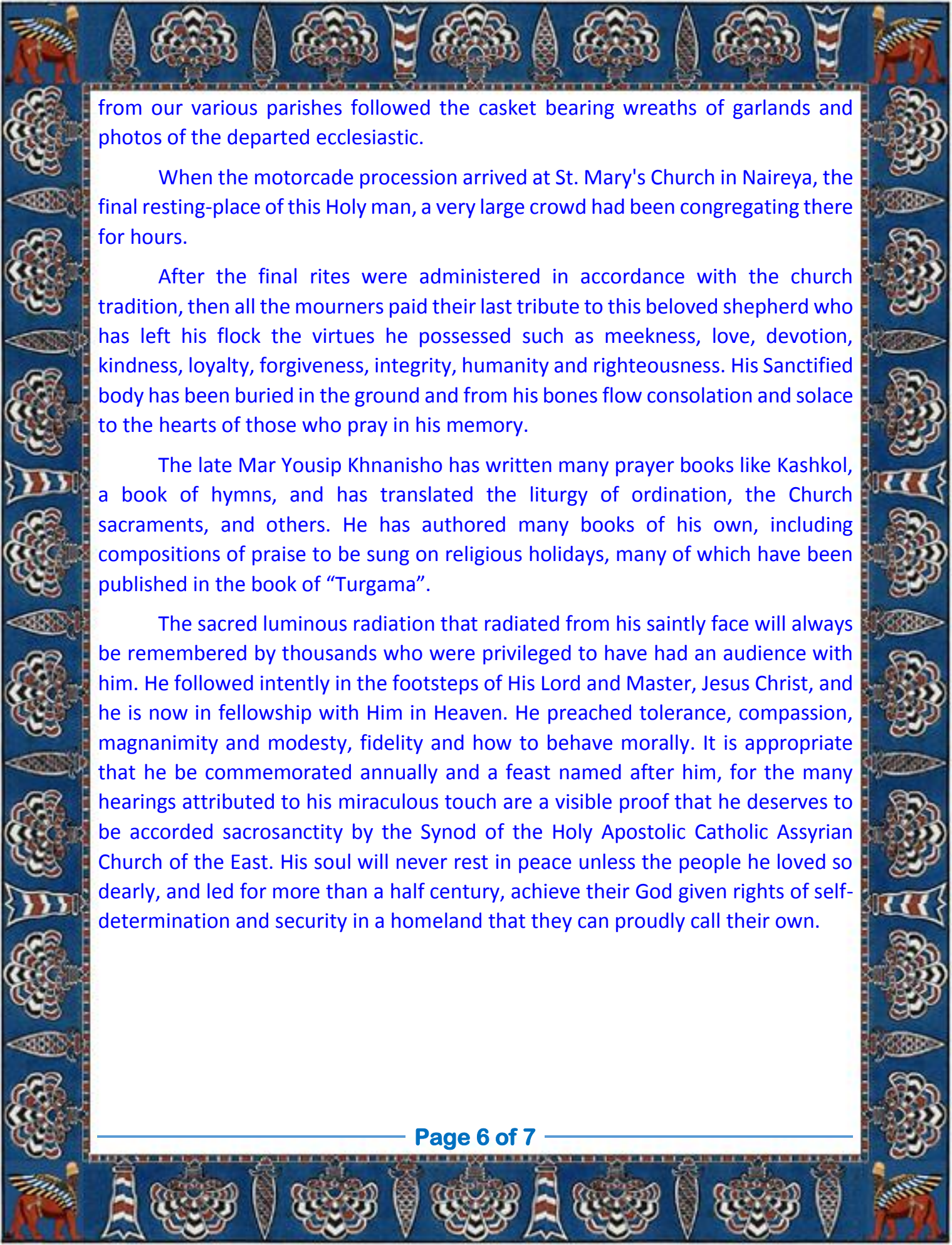
When Mar Eshai Shimun, the Catholicos-Patriarch, was exiled in 1933 by the puppet monarchial regime of Iraq, Mar Yousip Khnanisho was entrusted with the Church administration in Iraq and the Middle East.

In 1973 when Mar Eshai Shimun resigned his position as the Catholicos Patriarch, Mar Yousip Khnanisho was vested with responsibilities of administering the Church of the East throughout the world. At the same time the Iraqi government issued a Republican decree appointing Mar Yousip Khnanisho as the Supreme Head of all the Assyrians in Iraq.

On Sunday the 3rd of July 1977, at 1:10 P.M. His Beatitude passed away in Baghdad, Iraq. His death coincides with the feast celebrated every year in memory of Mar Tooma Shlikha (Saint Thomas the Apostle).

His funeral services were conducted on Wednesday July 6th, 1977, at the Church of Mar Gewargis in Dora, a suburb of Baghdad. Taking part in the services was His Beatitude Mar Narsai, Archbishop of Lebanon, who flew from Beirut for the occasion, assisted by Mar Daniel, Bishop of Kirkuk, Iraq, and a very large number of priests and deacons. More than twelve thousand people came from all parts of Iraq to participate in the funeral procession of this revered and saintly figure who was beloved and adored by all who knew him. A large number of dignitaries attended the funeral ceremonies, among them a high ranking government official representing His Excellency Ahmed Hassan Al Bakar, the President of Iraqi Republic, other ministers and officials, the Roman Catholic Archbishop representing His Holiness the Pope as ambassador to Iraq, His Holiness Mar Polus Shekho, the Patriarch of Babel of the Chaldean Church, His beatitude Mar Ignatius Zakka from the Syrian Orthodox Church, Mar Andrawos Sanna, Head of the Congress for Assyrian language and many others.

At 10:00 A.M., the draped coffin of the lamented Spiritual Leader, borne by clergy, acting as pall bearers, was removed from Mar Gewargis Church and placed in a hearse followed by thousands of mourners from all Christian denominations and Moslems too, with tears of grief, shedding over their faces. Hundreds of youth



from our various parishes followed the casket bearing wreaths of garlands and photos of the departed ecclesiastic.

When the motorcade procession arrived at St. Mary's Church in Naireya, the final resting-place of this Holy man, a very large crowd had been congregating there for hours.

After the final rites were administered in accordance with the church tradition, then all the mourners paid their last tribute to this beloved shepherd who has left his flock the virtues he possessed such as meekness, love, devotion, kindness, loyalty, forgiveness, integrity, humanity and righteousness. His Sanctified body has been buried in the ground and from his bones flow consolation and solace to the hearts of those who pray in his memory.

The late Mar Yousip Khnanisho has written many prayer books like Kashkol, a book of hymns, and has translated the liturgy of ordination, the Church sacraments, and others. He has authored many books of his own, including compositions of praise to be sung on religious holidays, many of which have been published in the book of "Turgama".

The sacred luminous radiation that radiated from his saintly face will always be remembered by thousands who were privileged to have had an audience with him. He followed intently in the footsteps of His Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, and he is now in fellowship with Him in Heaven. He preached tolerance, compassion, magnanimity and modesty, fidelity and how to behave morally. It is appropriate that he be commemorated annually and a feast named after him, for the many hearings attributed to his miraculous touch are a visible proof that he deserves to be accorded sacrosanctity by the Synod of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East. His soul will never rest in peace unless the people he loved so dearly, and led for more than a half century, achieve their God given rights of self-determination and security in a homeland that they can proudly call their own.



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[English]

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Dedication

I dedicate all my work published in 2013 to His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of *The Assyrian Church of the East*, with love, respect, and appreciation.